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Taylor, Richard Vipon

Railroad organization

Mobile

[1914]

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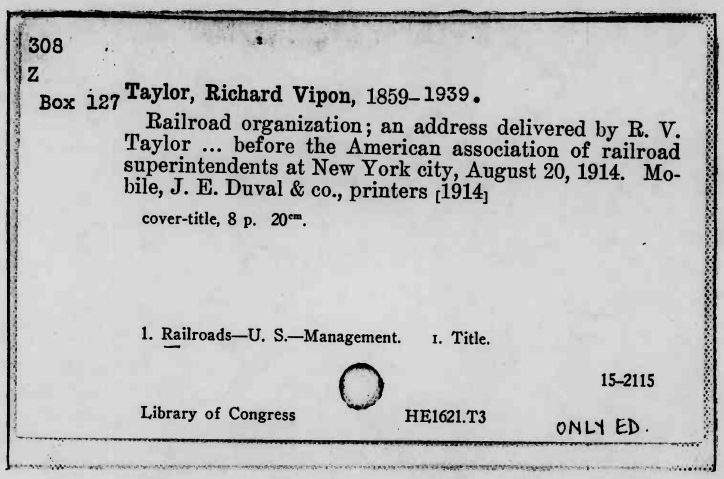

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Box 127 Taylor, Richard Vipon, 1859–1939.
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RAILROAD ORGANIZATION

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Box 127

An Address

Delivered by

R. V. TAYLOR,
Vice-President and General Manager
MOBILE & OHIO RAILROAD COMPANY

Before the

American Association of Railroad Superintendents

at

New York City
August 20, 1914

J. E. DUVAL & CO., PRINTERS, MOBILE

Aug. 22, 1923 AEL

Gentlemen:—

If I should be called upon for my opinion as to the official most important to the success of any railroad organization, I am certain that I could with perfect truthfulness say the Superintendent. His duties are of a manifold character. They have to do not only with the maintenance of the property and the movement of the traffic, by which he is brought in touch with its actual working forces, but they bring him into close relationship with the patrons of the Company from which it draws its life blood. Upon his good judgment and tact depends the relationship of the corporation to the municipalities and other forms of government with which it must be brought into contact, and every part of management, to some extent at least, must rely upon his intelligence, integrity and industry. For these reasons, I have selected "Railroad Organization" in its entirety upon which to speak to you to-day.

You must at once realize that my subject is a great one, in regard to which I can hardly hope to do more than express in a most condensed form, some of the general views which thirty-seven years of active railroad experience have enabled me to gather.

The word "organization" carries with it the precise definition of a union of individuals for the accomplishment of a definite purpose, and railroad organization, as I mention it, means the bringing together in systematic order, men and material necessary for the construction, maintenance, and operation, of steam railroads, the ultimate object of which is the transportation of "man and goods from place to place" with the greatest safety, the greatest dispatch, and the greatest economy.

The construction and operation of steam railroads, with the possible exception of agriculture, represent the greatest industrial enterprise ever undertaken in the world, and has certainly been the most important factor in the wonderful advance which civilization has made in the past hundred years.

The pioneers who drew about them the first organization for the carrying on of this great business, could not have formed an accurate idea of the marvelous growth which was to follow the seed they were planting, and yet they well and truly laid the foundation upon which the present structure of railroad organization has been builded.

A modern ship is the result of the accumulated experience of mankind in regard to shipbuilding, and no one man or generation of men can claim to have invented it; in like manner, no one man or generation of men can claim to have formulated railroad organization, as it exists to-day, for the reason that from the laying of the first rail of a steam railroad, to this moment, the steadily increasing requirements of transportation have made necessary additions to this structure, and piece by piece has been added, until railroad organization in its present form stands as the result of all the thought and labor upon the subject. As invention in ship building as far as laying the general lines is concerned, seems to have been exhausted, the creative genius who looks to this field for employment must content himself with attempting to build along established lines, the best ship among the many which sail the seas: so the railroad manager, no matter how great his constructive power, can only hope to draw together in reproductive form, the most complete and effective organization among the many of a similar character with which his must be brought into contact and competition. The manager who undertakes such a task as this, must deal with a multitude of individual factors made up of men and material of almost endless variety, and upon his judgment alone as to how he measures the availablility of the forces thus at his command, must depend his success or failure.

In my limited time I shall make no attempt to trace the correlation which must exist between each of the units which go to make up a successful railroad organization, but I will make the dogmatic assertion that there must be a reciprocal relationship between all of them. Each unit must be an inseparable part of an indivisible whole, toward which he must make a contribution of his strength and from which he should draw in turn a proportionate part of the diffused aggregate thus created. To give this illustration, the power and prestige of any railroad organization, must be created by the effort of the men who make up its rank and file, while on the other hand, each member of both the rank and file should receive power and prestige from the name and the character of the organization which he has helped to create.

The grand divisions pertaining to the maintenance and operation of a railroad's property, the roadway and track, the equipment, the transportation, the traffic, the legal, the accounting, the treasury deparments, are merely convenient groupings of individual factors which still retain their relationship to the whole, and are so divided only that the managing head may be enabled to quickly and fully understand the part which each unit is performing, and that he may be able to direct in the most effective way the forces at his command.

Each individual, after being taught that he has relationship to every other part of an organization, should be made to know that the definite purpose for which the organization has been created, is the transportation of passengers and freight, with safety, dispatch and economy. He should then be taught that he has a precise duty to perform. He should further be made to feel in the most impressive way, that the first and fundamental rule which should govern his service is that having been given a specific duty, that the perfect success of the aggregated forces of which he is a part, depends upon the way in which he performs it, and that unless his part is faithfully and fully carried out, the whole organization must fail of accomplishing in the best way, the end it has in view.

I have been very much impressed in reading the newspaper accounts of the hurried preparation for the great war which is now being waged beyond the seas; how as the

successive grades of the reserves have been called for, each man responded by number, to find his uniform already provided, and stored at a convenient central point awaiting him, and with the exact part he was expected to play, as well as the terrible purpose of the aggregate, grimly but clearly before him.

In the creation of a railroad organization, the ruling purpose should always be to provide by a methodical and orderly arrangement of forces, the means by which the guiding hand may in the most direct and effective way, reach down through each successive form of supervision to the man who actually does the work. In this connection I would like to tell a story. Many years ago I happened to be in the office of the General Freight Agent of one of our Southern lines, when a very florid, imposing man, highly dressed, with a dimond pin in his bosom, which flashed like the headlight of a locomotive, stepped in and in a loud resounding voice said, "I would like to see the boy who runs this office!" I was at the time talking to the General Freight Agent, who immediately advanced to meet this gentleman, and inquired, "What is it you want?" He again said, "I wish to see the boy who runs this office!" The General Freight Agent answered him, "My friend, I am at the head of this office, state to me what you desire." "Well", he said, "I have a circus out here on the outskirts of the town, and we are breaking up, and I have been promised that a car will be placed at the foot of St. Anthony Street on which to load an elephant. As horses are very much frightened by this animal, I want to know exactly when this car will be placed so I can have the elephant loaded with the least possible delay". The General Freight Agent turned to his Chief Clerk and asked him when the car would be placed. The Chief Clerk began to make enquiries, but before he could get a satisfactory response, little Eddie, the office boy, stepped up and said, "That car, sir, will come out of the yard on the two o'clock run, and will be placed at the foot of St. Anthony Street at two fifteen P. M., exactly". The circus

man replied, "Thank you, my son, I asked for you when I first entered this office, but had some trouble in reaching down to you."

The first purpose of a railroad organization should be the very thing which this circus man, in his blunt and direct way, attempted; that is, to reach in the most direct and effective way the individual who actually performs the work, although in this instance the circus man attempted to brush aside the forms of supervision created for the very end which he had in view.

In the creation of a railroad organization, the fact should never be lost sight of that while the orderly conduct of business through recognized channels and through classified division of forces, is necessary, the managing man should never permit any delegation of authority on his part to destroy a direct and positive relationship between himself and each one of the individual units under his control. Napoleon Bonaparte, who was probably the greatest organizer of men the world has ever seen, prized his title of "Little Corporal" which he won upon the bridge at Lodi, by leaving his position of command to fight in the ranks, more than all of the great honors with which his imperial brow was crowned, and the connection he maintained with the individuals constituting his army is impressively illustrated in the picture which shows a sleeping sentry awakening to find the emperor standing his watch while he slept.

Napoleon's best lesson, however, to any organizer of men, lies in the fact that he taught each one of his soldiers to feel that he carried a marshal's baton in his knapsack, and any railroad manager who does not impress upon his men the fact that all promotions will be made from their own ranks, fails to employ the greatest power at his command to create enthusiasm and solidarity among his forces.

After an organization has been drawn together, discipline becomes probably the most important factor in converting it into a living force, for an organization, no matter how skillfully created, not governed by wise rules, or even by

wise rules not enforced, must soon lose its effectiveness. In administering discipline, courage and consideration, firmness and fairness, should go hand in hand, and the fact should never be lost sight of that as long as we deal with human agencies, we must consider human imperfections. Weakness in the application of discipline brings the management into contempt, while extreme harshness creates a feeling of resentment scarcely less destructive to best organization.

"Esprit de corps" is much to an organization, "it implies sympathy, enthusiasm, devotion, and jealous regard for the honor of the body as a whole". It cannot, however, exist when discipline is absent. It is to the organization what the spirit is to the body; it is all pervading and ever present; it acts alike upon the highest and lowest; it makes the president of an organization speak with swelling pride of *his* officers and *his* men; it makes the call boy at the round house couple himself and the president under the common word of "us"; it makes the road man proud that he furnishes the safest possible track for the least possible money; it makes the station man, the yard man, and the train man, anxious that freight and passengers may be received and delivered, and that trains may be so despatched and moved that *their* traffic may be handled in the most effective way; it makes the shop men diligent that engines and cars may be in condition for the work they have to do; it makes the traffic man search eagerly for every additional item of business; it makes the accountant considerate as well as careful in requiring the most exact record of the company's funds; it makes the lawyer eloquent in court in defense of the company's legal rights; it even makes the treasuer glad to disburse from his coffers the well earned fruits of toil, and, last, it makes the manager's bosom swell with pride that he heads such an organization, and enables him with confidence to enter any field of traffic competition.

In calling upon such an organization as this, in a great emergency, and watching it as it promptly responds, the manager must feel something of the senation filling the breast

of a builder of a ship, who, as she leaves the ways, exclaims:

> "And see! she stirs!
> She starts,—she moves,—she seems to feel
> The thrill of life along her keel!"

In my own experience I have known of an occasion in which a line leading from the west to the southeast, was for the second succeeding season broken by the floods of the Ohio River. The organization, by the first flood, had been given notice that another might occur, and a year's preparation had been made before the second break happened. When the emergency, presented itself, the organization at once responded to meet it. An accurate estimate had been made of the probable maximum limit of the interruption to the movement of trains. The class of freight it was thought best to hold, and the character of traffic to be detoured had been decided upon, and all arrangements made with connecting lines for detour service. It had been determined beforehand, that certain freight should be held because it was believed that while perishables in limited volume might be gotten through the crowded terminals of the detour routes, that this other freight would make nearly if not quite as good time by being held along the direct line until communication was resumed, rather than to attempt detouring. To this end, beginning at the river on both sides, passing tracks as well as all other sidings, were blocked with these cars. The manager was at the moment of overflow, absent from his line, and had to return by a detour route. His presence, however, was not necessary, the organization had been trained to act without him. Before reaching his line, at one of the crowded terminals through which his freight was being moved, he found one of his master mechanics and a trainmaster, on the spot, and his own trains moving with as great, if not greater, dispatch, than those of the home company. Upon the opening of the through line, taking a lesson from the New York City traffic officers, the way was first opened only for northbound freight traffic and then southbound, and trains

were moved in battalions, first in one direction, and then in the other.

In a time of great stress the organization had been tested. It had been weighed in the balance, and not found wanting, and several hundred thousand dollars saved to the company by reason of the solidarity of its organization.

It is popular in these days to criticise railroad management and railroad managers, and while I hold no brief for the misdoings either large or small, which have crept into the management of some of the railroads of this country, I am certain that there never was a more courageous, honest, intelligent, and industrious, set of men, as a whole, engaged in any business than those who are devoting their lives to the transportation service of this country; and whether for the purpse of peace or war, I do not believe there ever has been a more effective organization of men than that under which these great affairs are managed and controlled.

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